

## CHILD ASSESSMENT CENTERS

Child Assessment Centers (CACs) are neutral, child-focused facilities where joint forensic interviews and a medical examination may be conducted with children in appropriate cases of suspected child sexual abuse and physical abuse.

All multidisciplinary agencies have a place to collaborate regarding investigative or treatment needs of the child and family from the report of the abuse through disposition of the case. The cooperation of the multidisciplinary team helps to prevent trauma to the child and non-offending family members caused by multiple contacts with different community professionals. The goals of the Child Assessment Center are:

- Reduce the emotional trauma of the investigation to the child and the non-offending family members;
- Improve the ability of the Child Abuse Investigator to reach an appropriate finding; and,
- Improve the multidisciplinary collaboration at the community level.

Although the primary focus of CACs is the multidisciplinary approach to child abuse

investigations, each Center may provide additional treatment, advocacy and educational services to children and their families. Such services offered by the Missouri Child Assessment Centers include but are not limited to:

- Individual, family and group counseling;
- Referral for Psychiatric services;
- Crisis intervention;
- Support/advocacy for court preparation.

Community educational services may include:

- Community awareness programs;
- Internet Sexual Abuse Prevention Program;
- Training for other community professionals;
- Maintaining an informational/resource library.

During FY '04, the CACs conducted 4,763 forensic interviews and provided a variety of services to 18,099 children.

The Missouri Network of Child Advocacy Centers was established as CACs directors and coordinators joined together to ensure the needs of sexually abused children and their families are met by receiving services utilizing the

multidisciplinary team approach. The Network's goal is to promote, assist, and support the development and continuation of CACs across the state. Another goal of the Network includes the development of a continuous growth plan to address community needs for additional centers.

In May of 2004, the Network became the recipient of a \$1,140,799 multi-year grant funded in whole by the Missouri Foundation for Health. This generous 3 year grant allows the Network to purchase state of the art equipment and offer state-wide training to multidisciplinary team members. In addition, a state-wide executive director and other staff have been hired to further the mission of the Network.

To address rapid growth issues without increases in the state appropriation, the Network has developed a funding formula which takes into consideration total population/child population of service areas provided by each CAC. Children's Division has received an appropriation of \$1,898,946 for SFY-05 to support regional Child Assessment Centers throughout the state. Statutory language (210.001.2 RSMo) was added to legislation in 2000 to address the Division's directive to fund specifically identified CACs. Currently, legislation notes the following Child Assessment Centers located regionally as: St. Louis City, St. Louis County, Jackson County, Buchanan County, Greene County, Boone County, Joplin, St. Charles, Jefferson County, Pettis County, Southeast Missouri (Cape Girardeau), Camden County, Clay-Platte County, Lake Area (Branson West), Ozark Foothills (Ripley County), and North Central Missouri (Trenton).

As service needs increase satellite centers have been or will be developed in the following locations: Monett (Barry County), Nevada (Vernon County), Hannibal (Ralls County), Ellington (Reynolds County), Kennett (Dunklin County), and St. Robert (Pulaski County). Butler County is also being considered as a potential satellite center site.